

A Partnership of Harmony:
The history basis for and the contemporary analysis of natural horsemanship


An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

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Abstract

The horse world is a booming industry. Horses have come into their own as companion animals and are now treated as family members instead of pieces of machinery. The development of the equine industry has allowed people with different styles of training to create lucrative livings dealing with horses. The techniques of natural horsemanship, or natural horse training have grown to a point where an industry has formed. This thesis examines the elements of horse behavior that contribute to the natural horsemanship system. It will also study the history of the relationship between humans and horses, and the industry that natural horsemanship has become. Finally, the effects of natural horsemanship on both the equine world and society as a whole will be examined.



*"There is no secret
closer than what
passes between a man
and his horse."*

- R. S. Surtees

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- ** Finally, I would like to thank my mother for being my inspiration and main resource for this subject, and for never pushing me towards her methods, but rather waiting for me to figure out the benefits of natural horsemanship for myself.



"A horse is the projection of people's dreams about themselves — strong, powerful, beautiful — and it has the capability of giving us escape from our mundane existence."

- Pam Brown

Introduction

"The essential joy of being with horses is that it brings us in contact with the rare elements of grace, beauty, spirit, and fire."

-Sharon Ralls Lemon

The world has a pulse. It continues to beat without wavering and relies on no one to keep it going. When the rhythm of two beats transform to meet each other, something magical happens – the stars align, the sun shines, and all is right in the world. This is natural horsemanship. It is the combination of two unlike souls - a pair of opposites – that makes a beautiful partnership of harmony.

The path of equine existence is an amazing journey. In 55 million years of history (Scanlan, 1998), they have survived through harsh existence in an unstable world, and evolved to be domesticated companions of the human race. Physically, horses have evolved from a small, hardy, prehistoric species, into the beautiful, elegant creature known today.

The horse's relationship with humans has also evolved, much to the benefit of the horse. Horses have kept human's bellies full with meat; kept their fires fueled with dung; pulled wagons across continents; cleared land; pulled plows; inspired artists, authors, and spectators; and now serve as companion and performance animals (Scanlan, 1998).

This thesis will discuss the behavior of the horse and how it relates to the methods of natural horsemanship. The history between humans and horses will also be evaluated, along with the industry that has been created by the rise of natural horsemanship.





The Horse

Today, horses are found in several occupational forms, including those in the wild, those used for show, work, pets, and entertainment. Although the activities and purposes of these horses vary, there are characteristics that define them all as horses. These are as follows:

- 1 – Flight – horses run when frightened
- 2 – The horses is highly perceptive
- 3 – Horses react quickly
- 4 – Horses learn very quickly
- 5 – Horses have an excellent memory
- 6 – Horses crave company
- 7 – Horses communicate with body language
- 8 – Horses must know whose boss
- 9 – Horses can be rapidly desensitized
- 10 – Horse are a precocial species (born fully developed) (Miller & Lamb, 2005)

Wild Horses

Although today horses are mostly associated with the domesticated pet or performance variety, wild horses are found all over the world, including North America, Australia, New

Zealand, England, and South America. Most of these herds are not naturally wild horses, but consist of feral horses, or horses with domestic ancestors, that have evolved back into a wild state (Miller & Lamb, 2005).

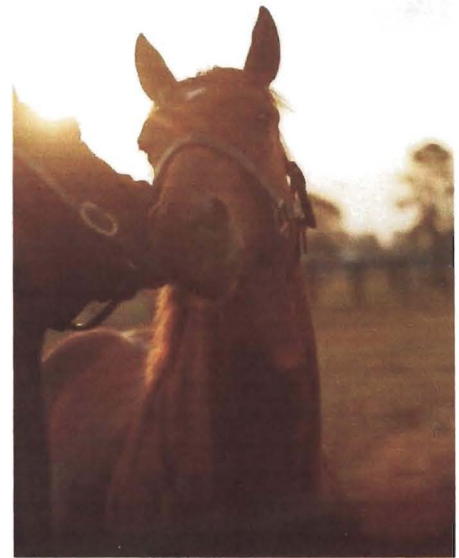
These wild horses exhibit the raw versions of characteristics that all horses do, yet humans have traditionally ignored that fact that these traits carry over to domestication. Survival is the horses' number one instinct, and many of the characteristics they exhibit reflect the need to protect themselves. For prey animals, the herd is the first line of defense against dangerous predators; therefore, horses feel weak and vulnerable away from their group. Their strength in numbers and willingness to follow an experienced, competent leader has allowed the horse to survive throughout history.

Wild herds are usually led by an older mare (hence the term alpha mare). Older stallions are run off by younger stallions and forced to join a bachelor's band in order to survive. In domestic herds, geldings are just as likely to be leaders; yet in both situations, once a leader is established, there is a dominance hierarchy or order of authority that filters down throughout the herd (Miller & Lamb, 2005). Dominance in the herd is established by one horse controlling another's body movements. At times these confrontations can seem severe, yet "a display of dominance, even if expressed in an act of aggression, is treated afterwards as if it never happened. The horses often resume grazing side-by-side with complete nonchalance" (Miller & Lamb, 2005, p. 182). Once a dominant horse has established their position, the submissive horse will reveal their vulnerable side through actions that include dropping their head down (their eye sight is not good in this position, nor can they easily take flight), and mimic eating or drinking (licking and chewing). These signs vary on their level of submission and the age/confidence of the horse (Miller & Lamb, 2005).

Behavior

“As a horse runs, think of it as a game of tag with the wind.”
-Tre Tuberville

The majority of interactions between horses occur through body language rather than vocal communication. As a prey animal, this form of silent communication is much safer (Miller & Lamb, 2005), as to not attract the attention of predators. The exhibition of dominance and submission plays out so silently and subtly that the unknowing eye may not be aware of the hierarchy being established. Friendly or happy gestures are also expressed without sound. The quite act of horses using their teeth to groom one another represents not only a sign of trust and friendship, but also is practical as it benefits the health of the skin (Ainslie & Ledbetter, 1980). They are very expressive about their moods and attitudes. They pout or sulk when their feelings are hurt, ask for forgiveness by exhibiting submissive behavior, reflect anger through hard facial expressions or lashing out violently, and show their happiness and playfulness through physical rejoicing. Horses in domesticated situations may be more vocal (such as feeding time, when meeting a new horses, or when nervous). This reflects the diminished need to protect themselves against wild predators.



The manner in which horse behavior has carried over into domestication is very interesting. According to Miller and Lamb (2005), “science now recognizes that much behavior is preprogrammed in the DNA of each animal species, and that other behaviors are the result of learning – of environmental experiences” (p. 79). Because behavior is at least partially a result of genetics, it can be controlled and manipulated through natural selection. Strong behavioral

characteristics have carried on throughout the evolution of the horses, as these traits are just as important to survival as the anatomy (shape) and physiology (function) of the horse.

The learned portion of horses' behavior begins the moment they are born. Their dams immediately begin imprinting them with the knowledge they need to survive. They are actually the quickest learning domestic animals, and learn desirable and undesirable behaviors equally fast (Miller & Lamb, 2005) – much to the dismay of humans. Horses have an amazing memory, therefore, after a trait is learned, it is retained. According to Miller and Lamb (2005), “behavior manipulating techniques may override the reaction to the memory but will not erase it. It lies there, dormant, waiting to be recalled with specific provocation” (p. 114). Their outstanding memory has been crucial to the horses' survival. They have to keep track where there are water and food sources, where danger has lurked and where the safe places are located. In domestication, they use their memory to recall who was mean to them, who was nice to them, to comprehend different situations, and remember injustices.

The horse's memory also plays a part in their fears. They remember when situations were scary and what elements were associated with the frightening stimulus. Horses, however, also have fears that are universal throughout the entire species. These fears are more engrained in the genetic portion of a horses behavior, and are associated with the need to survive, including: loss-of balance – horses are helpless when they are off their feet, therefore, unstable footing or a situation where they may fall or have fallen is frightening; the unfamiliar – horses assume that new things are dangerous until they are able to categorize them as harmless; predators – although there are few mountain lions roaming around barn aisles, big cats and large dogs (even the scent of them) may awake the primal fear of predators; the poll bone – the loose bone on top of a horses head can cause death if hit with force, which may lead horses to be timid

of the low roofs in barns and trailers; and finally, death - other dead animals or the scent of death could be an indication of danger lurking nearby, therefore is something to be feared (Ainslie & Ledbetter, 1980).

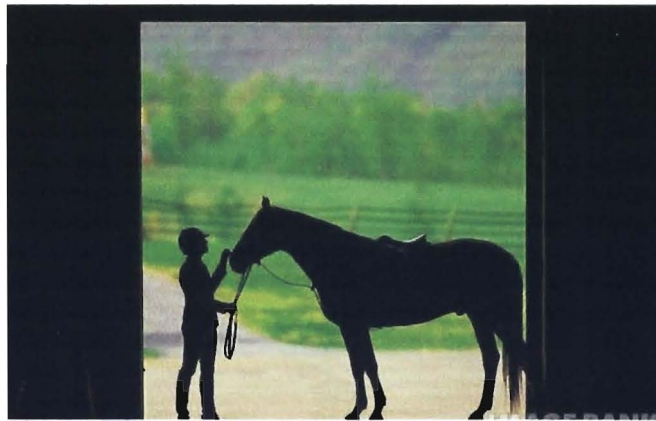
Many of these genetically engrained fears are responsible for the erratic horse behavior that leads humans to think of them as stupid or dim witted. Many of the things that horses are exposed to in domestic environments are not native to the areas where horses evolved. Their misunderstandings of these elements also contribute to the assumptions about their lack of intelligence. Horses run when they get frightened. During the execution of this reaction, the horse does not take into account to where he or she is going, be it a fence, a structure, a road, or any number of other dangerous situations. As the species evolved, none of these obstructions were in existence, and they were supposed to be able to run in the open plain for as long as it would take to get away from danger (Miller & Lamb, 2005). Horses are also supposed to have very sensitive olfactory organs, yet they contribute to the human assumption that they are dim-witted by eating items that cause health problems and even death. Horse's sense of smell evolved to differentiate not every scent, but only those that they would find in their region, therefore, the reason that they cannot tell the difference between some poisonous plants is because many of the plants (especially those imported or genetically altered for garden use) are not native to the horse's region (Ainslie & Ledbetter, 1980).

Not only are most of the horse's 'dumb' responses attributable to their evolution, but they also exhibit reactions that reflect highly advanced intellect. They respond to voice commands, usually based on nothing more than tone of voice and timing; they differentiate, almost immediately, different riding abilities or physical abilities of their handlers; and they find their way home in circumstances where most humans would become highly disoriented. This highly

perceptive response process can partially be attributed to the horse's heightened sensory awareness. Miller and Lamb (2005) state that "reacting quickly to unfamiliar stimuli of any kind is what has kept the horse extant for so many years" (p. 92). Predators are a threat as soon as a foal is born; therefore, horses are born with developed vision, hearing, touch, smell, and taste senses (Ainslie & Ledbetter, 1980).

Horses and Humans

Considering the range differences between horses and humans, it is amazing that a relationship was ever able to form. Here the ultimate prey animal is being paired with the ultimate predator and both parties benefiting from the partnership. The result of the domestication of the horse is now a beautiful relationship between two species, but the pairing has not always been as seamless as it is today.



Domestication

Some humans speak of domestication as if it were the root of all evil. As if by taming cats and dogs and horses, humans have brought on natural disasters, violence and cruelty, homelessness and hunger. They believe that animals started off in this world wild - and so they should stay. Many species of animals have the same idea about staying wild. In the last 10,000 years, humans have only been successful in domesticating about a dozen species in 4,000

attempts (Miller & Lamb, 2005). Ancient Egyptians attempted to train antelopes, gazelles, and hyenas; American Indians gave raccoons, bears, and moose all a try; and the Australia Aborigines tried to tame wallabies and kangaroos – all with no success (Scanlan, 1998)

Horses are a domestication success story (along with that of cows, sheep, dogs, cats, pigs and goats), and there are traits that they possess that have encouraged their domestication. To begin with, horses are social creatures whose complex and silent language enables them to respond to human signals. “Domestication [of the horse] was a natural consequence...for those...who were more curious, less territorial, less aggressive, more dependant [and] better able to deflect human aggression through submission” (Scanlan, 1998, p.76).

The horse’s physical attributes also made them ideal candidates for domestication. The horse’s diastema (space between front and back teeth) is perfect for the human control contraption of a bit. There are dental records that suggest biting use as long as 6,000 years ago. Horses also have physical characteristics that allow humans to utilize their speed, stamina, and strength. Their backs are strong enough to carry people or cargo, and they can pull apparatus that most other animals are not built to pull. Evidence (also from dental records) propose that humans were making use of horses physical attributes long before the first bit was used. Corralling and tethering is estimated as beginning 30,000 years ago (as apparent in evidence of cribbing in horses of this time period), and there is a 15,000-year-old carving of a horse with engraved halter lines (Scanlan, 1998).

The Relationship

Although evidence suggests that the initial relationship between humans and horses was suppressive and harsh, the total account of the affiliation is scattered with periods of cruelty and compassion, callousness and consideration. There is a long list of mistakes humans have made

with horses, but there is also a long list of accounts of the how highly the horse is regarded.

There has been a mutual adaptation between horse and man, and, in many aspects, the horse has been an agent of change for society rather than the other way around.

Compared to other animals, the horse is the only animal considered universally respected (Miller & Lamb, 2005). Despite the misunderstandings, love of the horse runs deep throughout history and throughout the world. Budha prohibited the eating of horsemeat in reverence of the species. Folk tales from all over the world describe the magical powers of all horses, especially the old, lame, and misshapen horses that would be thought of as useless and bothersome if they belonged to some other species (Scanlan, 1998).



The high regard in which horses are held, does not mean that humans have always taken the time to understand them. The misunderstandings that involve the horse have led to a long list of mistakes, including the way they are fed, housed, and especially in how they are trained. Luckily, one of the most prevalent aspects of the horse psyche is the ability to forgive, resulting in their continuous returns give humans more chances to get things right.

The majority of training techniques that humans practice completely contradict the horse's natural way of learning. Nature had programmed the horse to be anything but a servant, and man adopted brute force as a way to force submission from them. When met with opposition, humans tend to revert to the primal need to use force and tools, and in the horse world, tool use translates into gadgets and contraptions that lead to quick fixes rather than real

results. In the 6th century, Greek chariot drivers used bits with spiked cheek pieces to ensure quick turning. Ancient Egyptians and Europeans utilized extremely low nosebands and slit their horses nostrils in order to restrict air intake and guarantee more control. In West Africa, riders would use their own horse's blood as glue to attach themselves to the horse's back (Scanlan, 1998). Today, riders use contraptions to quickly achieve desired results. Lively horses are often 'bitted up' in order to gain more control of their speed; tie-downs and other sorts of head restrictions are used to manage horses head carriage; and the list goes on to include whips, spurs, and numerous other restrictive devices.

The mistakes man has made with horses extends beyond the use of contraptions to include the training methods themselves. In the 6th century, Federico Grisone created the first training system for horses. It involved very harsh and intense practices with no thought to the health and happiness of the horse (Miller & Lamb, 2005). The Renaissance brought about kinder techniques, and elevated riding to an art form, but the period also included extremes in cruelty and brutality. The current evolution towards more compassionate horsemanship has not completely erased harsh training practices. Several techniques are still widely used, including the 'sacking out' procedure where a horse is exposed to a stimulus continually until they cease reacting to it (Scanlan, 1998). This flooding practice "pushes the horse past its threshold of tolerance for a particular stimulus and ignites the horse's natural fear reaction" (Miller & Lamb, 2005, p. 109).

The Transformation

The mechanical age in society reshaped the role of horses from being a necessity to a recreation. Horses began fulfilling a companion animal role, compared to that of a transportation vehicle. The mechanical age opened the door for a change in the way humans see horses, but

society's evolution towards a service economy paved way for an industry of compassionate horsemanship to develop. "As a society, we have become ready for the revolution in horsemanship, where the horse is treated with respect, consideration, and compassion" (Miller & Lamb, p. 82). The transformation of the role of horses changed the face of the horse industry indefinitely.

Past Pioneers

"Animals have long told stories, but few humans have felt inclined or taken the time to listen."
(Scanlan, 1998, p. 85)

Preceding the dramatic change in horse's role, there were pioneers that went against tradition, that risked being prosecuted for their different take on horses and horses training, and rarely received any benefits for their efforts.

The earliest known groundbreaking horseman was a writer by the name of Simon of Athens. There are few known certainties about Simon, and his way with horses. Much of his life remains a mystery still today; however, he was openly concerned with the well-being of the horse, stating "what a horse does under compulsion he does blindly and his performance is no more beautiful than would be that of a ballet dancer taught by whip and goad" (Miller & Lamb, 2005, p. 171).

The most recognized horseman of the times was that of Xenophon. Although he wrote on many aspects of society, he made his way into the equine industry with the work "The Art of Horsemanship." Written in 350 BC, this piece of literature is still referred to today for its techniques involving compassionate horsemanship. In this work, Xenophon compares his horsemanship methods to those of Simon of Athens's, simply stating "we shall only gain authority from the fact that so great an expert in horsemanship held similar views to our own"

(Xenophon, 1962/written 350 BC, p. 1). Throughout his work with horses “[Xenophon] tried his best to see the world through the horse’s eyes” (Miller & Lamb, 2005, p. 172). His writing offered clarity to the majority of elements associated with horsemanship, most of which remain relevant in modern times.

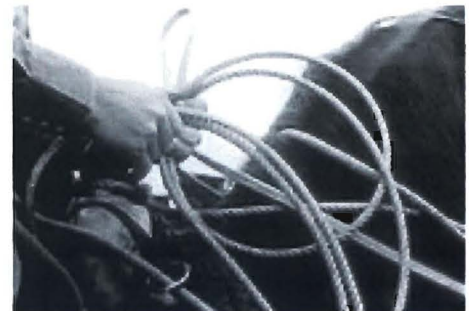
There is a bleak period lasting from the time of the very first horse masters to those of the early 15th and 16th century that is void of any literature or accounts of the practice of horsemanship.

The phase of deficiency was interrupted in the later portion of the 16th century when Antione De LaPlurinel emerged as the first riding master since Xenophon to consider the horse’s mind in his training. In addition to being a master of horsemanship, he also was a master of education. He used a cross training approach to educate his students, not only to ride, but also to think as well-rounded individuals. He saw the use of whips and spurs as a confession of an individual’s failure in horsemanship, and his goal was to train his students to be better all-around human beings (Miller & Lamb, 2005).

Nearly a century after De La Plurinel, Francios Robichon De La Gueriniere arrived on the horse scene as a Dressage trainer wishing to promote a ‘braid’ of horsemanship consisting of compassionate horse training, lateral balance, and longitudinal balance. He “believed that basic training should be the same for every horse, regardless of its intended use, and stressed the importance of understanding the horse” (Miller & Lamb, 2005, p. 182). Besides being one of the few dressage trainers to heavily weigh compassion in his training, De La Gueriniere is also credited with inventing the shoulder-in, half-halt, counter-canter, and flying lead change – all movements that remain imperative to horse training.

The first accounts of compassionate horsemanship appearing in North America originated with the plains Indians; however, many of their methods were littered with harsh and forceful elements. Finally in the mid 19th century, John Solomon Rarey became THE North American advocate for horse's well-being. Rarey was the first horseman to promote his techniques to a mass audience, much like professions do today. He became a rich man giving demonstrations and proved his commitment to making society better by donating some of his proceeds to charity. Writers of his time would use Rarey's philosophy of using kindness, firmness, and patience when dealing with adversary and the verb, to 'Rarefy' appeared in the dictionary. Rarey's impact on society was so notable that Ralph Waldo Emerson stated Rarey "turned a new leaf in civilization" (Miller & Lamb, 2005, p. 194).

These early horsemen influenced the horse industry in a profound way and helped to shape it into what it is today. There were several other individuals who incorporated empathy in their training; however, these horsemen either did not have good repute with people, or



did not exhibit the want to share their methods with mass audiences through writing and teaching. Unfortunately, unless a student learned and mastered the technique and carried it on to the public, their techniques were lost when their life ended.

Many of the practices of these early horsemen, both with horses and with the public, are mirrored in modern professional horseman. Like today's professionals, many of the past pioneers were loved by the press; had their own training systems that included books and other literature; and acquired student followings. There were also accounts of professionals that

swindled their way into popularity by making false claims about their accomplishments, and those who wished to remain anonymous about their achievements.

Modern Professionals

At present, there are numerous professionals who make their living by marketing the techniques derived from the original compassionate horsemanship experts.

The father of the modern revolution in horsemanship is considered to be Tom Dorrance (1910-2003). He prompted people to “see the world through the horse’s eyes” (Scanlan, 1998), and urged individuals to retain the curiosity in young horses because “curiosity is the emotion opposite FEAR in a horse” (Miller & Lamb, 2005, p. 28). He is considered the head of the revolution because most of the professionals of today cite Dorrance as the inspiration or initiator of their practices.

Dorrance did not really want his methods to spread too deeply into the horse world because he was worried about the negative effects on the industry. Ray Hunt, a student of Dorrance, exposed Dorrance’s techniques to the public in general. Different personalities then embraced the methods and carried them into new directions.

The most widely known professionals are those who took the natural horsemanship ‘product’ and marketed it to the public as a packaged system. These include the likes of Monty Roberts, Pat Parelli, John Lyons, and Clinton Anderson. Although the methods of these individuals are based on the principles of compassionate horsemanship, they have been altered in order to make a unique selling point that is profitable. These professionals are the most instrumental in developing their own signature equipment, and other profitable ventures.

There is a second tier of professionals whose techniques are rather well-known in the equine world, yet they have opted to not push their methods into the realm of popular culture.

The horsemen include Chris Cox, Dennis Reis, and several others. They have their own styles; however, choose to not utilize the catch phrases and paraphernalia as do the tier one professionals.

The last group of horsemen is made up of the traditionalists who are most concerned with teaching those with a strong desire to learn the techniques of compassionate horsemanship, and have little to no desire to gain popularity. These individuals include Peter Campbell, Buck Branaman, Craig Cameron, and Mark Rashid. These persons have separate interpretations of the ideals of compassionate horsemanship, yet exhibit the most uncontaminated views of training horses, and encourage their students to be the most open-minded about different techniques.

Although the methods of these professionals are based on the same principles, the variations in their practices spread wide. There are different equipment suggestions including: whether or not to use a martingale; halter styles; and bit styles. They all agree that lateral flexion is a key element to gaining control of the horse's attitude, yet their processes for achieving this movement fluctuate between methods. There are also variations in the techniques for picking up a horse's foot; teaching a horse to back up; the use of touch in the training process; the use of treats; the driving methods used to motivate the horse; and the ultimate process for creating a bond between horse and humans.

The Methods

Compassionate horsemanship encompasses the entire human/horse relationship. The centaur of Greek mythology is a perfect representation of the ultimate goal where there is a perfect bond between horse and rider (Scanlan, 1998). In order to create this bond, there must be a common language agreed upon by both parties involved. The principles of this type of communication are fairly simple, and revolve around basic principles of action and response.

The proposal is to use the least amount of pressure necessary to obtain a desired response; however, humans tend to resort to large amounts of pressure FIRST. In order to exhort the desired amount of pressure, humans have to embrace their tendency to overdo actions and expand their outlook to discover behaviors to reward rather than criticize (Miller & Lamb, 2005).



The process of compassionate horsemanship begins with establishing the need for leadership. Usually “the herd is a source of safety and comfort for the horse. [Humans] need [the horse] to believe that when [they] are around, he will be even safer and more comfortable” (Miller & Lamb, 2005, p. 97). Leadership and submission is established through controlling the horse’s movement in one of two ways: immobilization and driving. Utilizing the driveline, or the point where a horse responds to pressure in front of and behind it, one can create or restrict the movement of the horse. Through this process, one is essentially gaining control of the horse’s feet - the most important tool to their survival. By controlling their feet, one can gain the horse’s respect, and control of the horse’s attitude and behavior.

If the request specified by the handler is answered with a positive response from the horse, the reply should be rewarded through a form of reinforcement to encourage the repetition of acceptable responses. If the handler initiates positive reinforcements, they add something to the situation, such as petting, stroking, or giving the horse a treat. Negative reinforcement involve a stimulus being removed, such as when pressure is applied until a desired response is

achieved and removing the pressure as a reward. Table 1 illustrates the quadrants of operate training.

Table 1 – Quadrants of Operate Training

Positive Reinforcement *Something pleasant is added to encourage positive behavior	Negative Reinforcement *Something unpleasant is subtracted to encourage desired behavior
Positive Punishment *Something unpleasant is added to discourage unwanted behavior	Negative Punishment *Something pleasant is subtracted to discourage unwanted behavior

(Miller & Lamb, 2005)

In order to correctly establish the desired response, the rewards have to be immediate and directly associated with the stimulus. The practice of rewarding the try – or rewarding even the smallest positive response – is one of the principles that defines compassionate horsemanship, because this practice was not widely encouraged until quite recently. ‘Rewarding the try’ is a modern principle of the philosophy of Captain Etienne Beudant (1863-1949) who said, “Ask often, be happy with a little, reward always” (Miller & Lamb, 2005, p. 12).

The entire process of compassionate horsemanship is completely reliant upon the body language of the horse. By speaking the horse’s language, humans can better diagnose what, when, and where things need to be asked. To those that do not understand how horses communicate, the methods involved may seem anything but compassionate. Through realization that horses are rough with each other, but every movement and queue means something, one can identify that the interaction is merely physical pressure and not violence. “Perhaps violence is best defined not by an objective measure of force, but rather the mental states of the ones involved” (Miller & Lamb, 2005, p. 42). In other words, exactly the same action, performed twice with two separate mindsets, can result in a completely different communication reading. The questions asked of the horse in the process of compassionate horsemanship should be

received as an instruction to do something with a reward for every correct attempt, whereas “violence requires that the one on the receiving end feel violated” (Miller & Lamb, 2005, p. 43).

Many refer to the leadership established in this process as dominance. Dominance, however, does not have to reflect the negative, harsh stereotypes usually associated with the word (i.e., Adolph Hitler, Sadaam Hussein). Several professionals in the industry teach the idea that a handler should be absolutely dominant over their horse; however, as apparent in natural horse behavior, the horses respect, but do not like the alpha horse. Ideally, there should be a mutual respect between horse and human and a range of dominance depending on the horse and their history (i.e., dictator, benevolent, partnership). The receptivity of the human leadership role varies from day to day; therefore, a daily check that begins with establishing friendship (non-aggressive posture, touch, grooming) and moves to leadership (asking for specific movements) establishes a routine for optimum acceptance of human leadership by the horse.

The hitch in compassionate horsemanship is that it is natural to horses not humans. The desire of the methods is “achievement of that elusive goal: complete respect devoid of fear” (Miller & Lamb, 2005, p. 74). This represents the idea of creating horses that will comply with human requests but do it because they *want* to – *not* because they are *forced*. Richard Shrake reminds people that “all resistance may not be able to be eliminated, but it’s a goal worth striving for” (Miller & Lamb, 2005, p. 46). Because the quality of the result is determined by the actions of the handler, those who cannot get the methods to work are usually lacking education, coordination, timing, and feel, thus establishing conditioned responses from their horses and becoming frustrated with the methods. Just as the training methods themselves, the journey of learning compassionate horsemanship is a process. According to Clinton Anderson, “the key is to keep learning” (Miller & Lamb, 2005 p. 52).

The Industry

As discussed previously, changes in society have allowed for drastic reformation of the equine industry as a whole. Horses and horsemanship are no longer a necessity, but now are a beloved form of recreation. Instead of people having to rely on horses to live, they are now living to have horses (Miller & Lamb, 2005). As a result in the shift in society, there have been advancements in people's approach to horsemanship.

Societal transformation prepared the equine industry for acceptance of the new ways of horsemanship; however, the actual revolution first began far from where one might suspect -- with the men of the Western cattle ranches. These horsemen were not looking for a revolutionary new training technique, or a way to create their own form of popularity. They simply found that by training the way horses think, their jobs became immensely easier. They were also very competitive and would perfect their skills in the hopes of beating out other horsemen. These friendly competitions were prime platforms for young or less experienced horsemen to acquire more skills and perfect their abilities (Miller & Lamb, 2005).

The 1970's benchmarked the comeback of the horse (Miller & Lamb, 2005). They reappeared as a status figure, and the public had the means to pour money into the development of the industry. The cowboys had developed their reputation to a point where they were branching out beyond their ranches, giving small clinics and building small followings of supporters. Many of these professionals had little to no desire to create an uprising of compassionate horsemanship in the equine industry, but rather desired to teach those who wanted to become closer to their horses for personal rather than professional reasons.

In the 1980s, the philosophies and methods of these cowboys fell into the hands of several teachers and entrepreneurs who recognized the need and desire for this type of teaching.

They began marketing this form of horsemanship as a product, and when Pat Parelli coined the term “Natural Horsemanship,” an industry was born. The public was willing to spend time and money to obtain a competitive edge, and they found their answer in this new way of horsemanship. Other people were also getting ‘turned-off’ of the show ring because of corruption and biasness, and they wanted to find a way to reconnect to their horses – and natural horsemanship provided them with just that (Miller & Lamb, 2005).

In retrospect, there were many elements supporting the rise of compassionate horsemanship in society. Ultimately, abusive treatment is caused not by heartlessness or unkindness, but rather ignorance. The education level of horse owners is generally quite high, and “education opens one’s eye to how little one really knows and to how much more there is to learn” (Miller & Lamb, 2005, p. 79). The explosion of the availability of information also has allowed the industry to expand exponentially as everyone has access to the techniques and methods without ever attending a clinic or session. Overall, society is placing more emphasis on animal welfare, and creating kinder gentler relationships among all living beings (Miller & Lamb, 2005).

The industry of compassionate horsemanship has done amazing things for the equine world as a whole; however, like most commercial entities, flaws have developed that weaken the status of the industry. Tom Dorrance, father of modern compassionate horsemanship, foresaw the development of these defects (Miller & Lamb, 2005). He discouraged people from using his name, as to not be “part of the discourse” because the “vast commercial of horsemanship bothered him” (Miller & Lamb, 2005, p. 30). He felt that the new popularity of the horsemanship industry was simply packaging and mass-producing methods for weekend enthusiasts.

Through the packaging of training systems, an entire language has been coined for the market place. Beyond ‘compassionate horsemanship’ and ‘natural horsemanship,’ the list of terms describing the different methods includes catch phrases such as ‘resistance free horsemanship,’ ‘new age horsemanship,’ ‘progressive horsemanship,’ ‘downunder horsemanship,’ ‘renaissance horsemanship,’ and ‘outside-the-box horsemanship’ (Miller & Lamb, 2005). This language provided the industry with a product to promote, rather than just general techniques, but the emphasis behind the message is lost. Each of the separate terms represents a system developed by an individual that uses the same principles, but packaged in a unique way in order to stand out among the many professionals in order to protect their livelihood.

With so many clinicians competing for the public’s dollars, they have to present their ideas as being superior to the competition. Many of these clinicians end up voicing their negative opinions about opposing individuals. In addition to generating a large disservice to the industry itself, this practice of criticizing makes it difficult for some students to keep variations between teachers or concepts in perspective after listening and learning from only one (Miller & Lamb, 2005). The lack of scope that results from tunnel vision undermines the idea that it is imperative to continue to learn and evolve in order to completely appreciate the value of compassionate horsemanship.

Effects of Compassionate Horsemanship in the Equine World

Compassionate horsemanship is built on very simple principles and has been combined with many outlying ideas about what works best in horse training. The transformation in horsemanship simply *asks people to question everything anyone thinks they know about horses*, including the very practices of compassionate horsemanship (Miller & Lamb, 2005). To

question the methods means that a person is searching for answers, and will eventually find what works for them. Not all people are the same, nor are all horses, so the process of finding the correct match must remain an open-minded learning experience.

Because the principles of compassionate horsemanship are completely unnatural to humans, there is a process to put oneself in the position to want to learn and change. This journey includes: observing; remembering; comparing; listening more; talking less; taking responsibility rather than assigning blame; placing the wants and needs of another creature ahead of their own; and forgiving (Miller & Lamb, 2005). Once one's ego is put aside and the desire for knowledge is exposed, the process of finding success with compassionate horsemanship may not be smooth, and can result in more feelings of failure before victory is achieved.

The transformation of more and more people to this compassionate way of thinking is apparent in the modifications in the equine world. There are cowboys giving clinics in dressage barns, and dressage clinicians teaching cowboys. People are more open to new techniques and options, rather than criticizing anything that is not traditional. The language of horse trainers has even changed. People refer to the initial training process as 'starting' rather than 'breaking', and discourage the negative connotations associated with some equine terms (Miller & Lamb, 2005). The equipment is even evolving to become tailored to the horse, rather than being created for the handler's comfort.

Effects of Compassionate Horsemanship on Society in General

“When given the chance, the horse completes us.” (Miller & Lamb, 2005, p. 320)

“The horse is truly a vehicle for not only transporting but also elevating the human species, for taking us closer to that elusive goals in realizing human potential” (Miller & Lamb,

2005, p. 315). In modern society, human potential is greatly limited by the speed in which the public is forced to live. The slogan “life is what happens to us while we are waiting for it to begin” advertises what it is like to live in a world that is moving too fast to enjoy it. Horses force people to slow down in a world that is constantly going faster and force people to live in the moment.

Popular culture has embraced the public’s fascination with horses, and successfully (and perhaps in avertedly) promoted the compassionate wave of horsemanship. The public was introduced to natural horsemanship with the release of the motion picture, “The Horse Whisperer”. The idea that a horse that needed help could also heal people and bring them closer illustrates the horse’s influence of the human spirit. “Seabiscuit” also proved to be an advocate for compassionate horsemanship. No techniques or methods of modern natural horsemanship were exhibited; however, the movie confirmed how intelligent and humane training would produce success, even in the face of adversary.

The power of horses is being recognized and applied in reformation and healing of humans. The outcast horses and humans have been made partners in the process of prisoner reformation, where horses retired from track racing are placed in prison barns. Compassionate horsemanship techniques are taught to the men who then utilize the techniques to transform the horses into sale prospects. The program is appropriately named “Saving horses – changing men” (Miller & Lamb, 2005).

The techniques used by horsemen are also being utilized in the corporate world. “Natural horsemanship clinicians are being invited into corporate boardrooms to teach the arts of gentle persuasion, benevolent leadership, and nonverbal communication to companies wishing to have better managers and happier, more productive employees” (Miller & Lamb, 2005, p. 15).

Perhaps the standardization of compassionate horsemanship techniques proves that humans and horses are not that much different after all.

Overall, horses are an agent of change in the human condition. The revolution in horsemanship has implications far beyond the horse that help to make humans an all-around better all-around species. At one point in history, horses were well on their way to being featured in zoos - **“maybe they came back to save us”** (Miller & Lamb, 2005, p. 321).

Summary and Conclusions

“Show me your horse and I will tell you who you are.”
-English saying

Humans throw curveballs. We pitch an idea straight down the middle, and just as other species figure it out, the idea spins and morphs into something completely different. For centuries, horses have not only dealt with what humans have tossed to them, but thrived. This is the mystery of the horse.

The relationship between man and horse is anything but natural; the ultimate predator and the ultimate prey. From the beginning of the relationship, horses have dealt with misunderstandings, hardships, mishandling, and misuse. It is obvious that until recently, few humans have dedicated the time and energy it takes to understand any species other than their own. The human/horse relationship has developed from an awkward correlation of ultimate domination involving brute force, to becoming an equal relationship where both parties have something to offer and gain.

Humans and horses have always offered each other with characteristics that the other lacks. Horses have provided humans with speed, stamina, strength, and now companionship. Humans have provided horses with food, water, shelter, safety and now, understanding. The

added benefits of companionship and understanding have evolved because of the encouragement by society to find out WHY things work in certain ways. Horsemen are being allowed and encouraged to take the time to observe and understand the natural behavior of horses. Through observation, humans have discovered how horses truly interact and behave, and are now able to apply the same actions and concepts to maximize the effectiveness of training.

The use of these different training methods has been so effective in building relationships between humans and horses that it has developed into an industry. Just as many other mainstream ideas, the “natural horsemanship” industry has become its own worst enemy. The professionals in the field have had to develop ways to mass produce their techniques and to make their ways unique among their competitors’ methods. The consumers in the industry have the financial freedom to pay for a “natural horsemanship” education. The competition for these students has driven relationship between professionals from competitive to caddy.

The unfortunate consequence of these conflicts is that they shadow the importance of the natural way of horse training. Although the techniques used today are largely altered to attract a mass audience (thus losing some of their potency), the ‘revolution’ has brought people of all levels of experience together with their horses. People are finally taking the time to understand *why* their horse does not want to go into a trailer or through the water jump on a cross-country course. Those that do use the techniques to the fullest reap the benefits of having horses that perform to their maximum ability.

All the marketing and public relations for the industry aside, the concept of natural horsemanship is all about the natural behavior of the horse. In the world of the horse, there are leaders and followers, and there are reactions to stimuli that have been ingrained in the horse’s psyche throughout evolution. Domestication of the horse has done little to alter this behavior.

They all exhibit the concepts of trust, justice, injustice, attitude, and all the feelings usually only associated with humans. In order to incorporate the natural aspects of horse's behavior into their training, one has to understand WHY certain things happen, and why horses react in a certain way.

The basic principles of natural horsemanship involve action and reaction repeated over and over again. For example, a trainer puts pressure on a horse, be it mental (eye contact, special threat, etc...), or physical (leg pressure, bit pressure, etc...) and the horse reacts (or does not react) in a certain way. The next action of the trainer is in direct response to the initial reaction of the horse. This could mean increasing the pressure to get a stronger response, patiently holding pressure until the horse figures out the desired response, or releasing pressure as a reward. This cycle of actions and reactions never ends.

Just as every horse takes a different amount of time to understand any human training method; it has taken humans different amounts of time to understand horses. At first glance, it may seem like this natural type of training is a recent phenomenon; however, several individuals recognized long ago that understanding their horses resulted in increased performance levels. These people were few and far between and not always recognized for their contribution to the horse world.

Today, natural horsemanship is used to get ultimate performance in the show ring, to create a partnership with a pet, and ultimately to get closer to the horse. The students of natural horsemanship pay to learn the techniques of professionals. The professionals are profiting off their methods and have nothing to loose by spreading their techniques to the population at large. Before horses became the hobby that they are today, they were a way of life. They carried soldiers into war, were a symbol of intelligence and wealth for their owner, and were the number

one farm/ranch hand. A horse and its behavior could make or break the reputation of the people associated with it. Throughout history there were individuals who took the time to understand the horse and reaped the benefits for doing so. Although these horsemen may have been just as talented (if not more so) than the professionals of today, they shied away from sharing their techniques with the public. Their methods were their way of life, and sharing them could have jeopardized everything that they had worked for. A few of these horsemen recorded their experiences and techniques, and a few others did allow others to watch them work. These records are now being seen as the beginnings of natural horsemanship – originating during the times of Xenophon!

Natural horsemanship has now become widespread and profitable. Competitive edges are no longer secrets, but bought and sold among horsemen. People have the time to study their horses, and the desire to create better relationships with them. ***“Indeed, the revolution in horsemanship is much more. It is a revolution in relationships.”*** (Miller & Lamb, 2005, p. 114)

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Reflections

When I began the process of writing this thesis, I thought I had a pretty good grasp of the concepts of natural horsemanship. I have grown up living every little girl's dream of being able to have a pony and ride any time I wanted. My education about involving horses has evolved to encompass several different types of horse training, including that of natural horsemanship.

My first experience with the natural horsemanship boom was at the first barn where I took lessons. There we had a 'show team' that would raise money through training and grooming horses, in order to help support our habit. I was invited to the team at the young age of eight because I had actually been taking lessons since the age of four. At that time, there was a little paint pony that was in for training, and fell in love with her. About this time John Lyons began his popularity in the horse world, and we (as eight to fifteen year olds) understood Lyons' concepts as running the horse around until they would follow us. The concept seemed pretty logical at the time, so there we were, taking turns running around the indoor arena like mad, chasing this pony to see which person she would finally follow. Luckily, the pony was forgiving, and none of us lost our head (literally).

For all of us, horses were synonymous with life. We would muck stalls, feed, and do anything just to spend time around the horses. I remember one winter, walking up the drive to the barn in a foot of snow because it had not been plowed yet and cars could not make it. In hindsight, I have discovered two very important things about that time in my life. First of all, it was amazing that my friends and I did not get hurt more often with all the stupid things we did. Secondly, those stupid things taught me more about horse behavior than I ever could imagine. We would discover things by trial and error, even if we did not fully understand the reasoning behind it (such as when galloping at full speed through the woods, the horses would spin, dump

us over their heads, and know that there was a snake or barn dog or anything else around the corner before we did).

During this portion of my life, and for several years following, I was the competitor in the family. I wanted to run and jump and win and ride, but really was not all that interested in this thing called natural horsemanship. My mother, however, absorbed everything she could. She would go out and work all of our horses from the ground, just to get the experience of how different types of horses responded to different actions she made. She would work with my horse and he would be much improved, but I paid no attention. I guess my mother knew I would find out things for myself, in my own time, and never pushed her way of thinking on me.

Finally I left the homestead and ventured across state lines to go to college. Through an amazing scholarship opportunity, I was able to afford toting my horse along. Suddenly, I was on my own, and NOTICING things about my horse that I never had before. I was by myself, knew nobody, and my horse was truly my best friend. Basically the only instruction I had access to were my nightly phone calls to home as I drove back to my dorm room. I am sure that my mom got tired of my questions: "Why is ____ happening when I do this?"; "Why does Rockie _____ why this happens?" She would patiently answer without ever over-loading me with information.

Right before my junior year, I bought a horse for the first time (the rest of my horses had been homebred, or family raised). He was a beautiful, big, racehorse that had more quirks than I knew what to do with. I had two horses to take care of, and could not afford to go wrong with either of them.

Finally, I was figuring out things on my own and the phone calls to my mom were more discussions about techniques instead of an hour's worth of questions. I began to analyze WHY things were happening and was better able to assess different situations. My horses began to

respond, and I understood why my mother had put forth so much time and energy to learn the ways of natural horsemanship.

As I mentioned, I thought coming into this project that I had a pretty good grasp of what natural horsemanship was and why it was needed – and I did! I just had no idea of how deeply the techniques were embedded. The idea that the thread can be traced back to the times of Xenophon, and that the pieces of literature from that time, remain very relevant to today's techniques is mind boggling to me.

Perhaps one day I will stop spoiling my own horses long enough to train them as I should (yeah, right, and go to the moon). Perhaps another day I will have the patience to devote myself and my training techniques fully to the practices of natural horsemanship. Through the completion of this project, I have learned that it is alright to allow myself enough time to absorb all that I can before settling on one set of methods. I have also accepted that, like all things with horses, my own transformation may not take place overnight. If it has taken society *centuries* to perfect natural horsemanship, perhaps I can allow myself a few more years.



(Cassidy Sitton & GH Sir Rocko, 2003)